

one American against another. We do enough of that ourselves; we don't need anybody else's help. And the record is clear, in terms of 2016, that Russia was all over the place spreading disinformation, trying to create conflict within the Democratic primary, within the Republican primary, and during the general election.

November will be here before we know it. Here is what we have to ask ourselves as a body—and eventually be held accountable by the public and history. What did we do in July to answer the alarm raised by Director Dan Coats about the warning lights blinking red? I see attacks on critical infrastructure going on today, and I will expect them to continue. We need to up our game as a nation.

I don't know how any of us can go to our constituents in November and say that we answered Dan Coats' call if we do nothing. So I hope that Senator MCCONNELL and Senator SCHUMER can find a way to come up with a common agenda—maybe starting with the Rubio-Van Hollen bill—to see if there is common ground to deal with a common problem.

I would ask President Trump not to look backward, but to look forward. I have no doubt that you won the election, Mr. President, in 2016. The Russians didn't beat Ms. Clinton; you did. But what they are up to now can jeopardize our democracy.

We are just a stone's throw away from their changing vote totals. Senator RUBIO knows this better than I because he is on the Intelligence Committee. They are already infiltrating voter registration files. It would not be much of a leap to have some votes flipped through cyber attacks. So we have a chance in the coming days—working together, not against each other—to find solutions to this problem. I am sure whatever we come up with will not be perfect, but at least we tried. The one thing I cannot live with is not trying.

I have known Dan Coats for well over a decade, Secretary Pompeo, the entire national security team, Senator BURR, Senator WARNER, Senator RUBIO—they all tell us the same thing: Our critical infrastructure is under attack by foreign powers, Russia being the leader. The question for us is, What do we do about it?

I am hoping that next week the President will call the Congress together, in a bipartisan fashion, to come up with some preventive measures to protect our infrastructure, when it comes to the November election, and that we, as a nation, try to figure out what the rules of engagement are going to be, not to just defend ourselves from aggression but punish the aggressor.

I don't have all the answers. I am not suggesting this is my area of expertise, because it is not, but I am smart enough to know Russia is going to continue what they did in 2016, until somebody makes them pay a heavy price, and it is just not Russia; be it Iran,

China, North Korea, or other bad actors.

I don't know how, as a body, we can live with ourselves if we don't try to heed Dan Coats' warnings. They are not just given by him but by those who work for him, who are nonpolitical, who have made it their life's work to find ways to protect this Nation.

So, Mr. President, we have a chance to bring the Congress together. Challenge us to work with you to find solutions to this looming threat, better ways to defend America's critical infrastructure when it comes to our 2018 election, and challenge us to work with you. I hope we will be smart enough to meet that challenge, and I hope you will issue that challenge. You are the most special person in our constitutional democracy when it comes to national security. You are the Commander in Chief. You rightly criticized President Obama for being slow when it came to reacting to Russian interference in 2016. I am sure that was a hard call for President Obama, but there is no doubt in my mind that you, the Senate, and the House are now on notice—by your own intelligence services—that Russia is interfering now and will continue to do so up to 2018 and beyond unless somebody stops them. At a minimum, we should come up with defensive measures available to us. As a nation, we need to deal with this threat.

I am not worried about a foreign power taking over our country in a conventional military fashion. I am worried about foreign powers and terrorist organizations using cyber attacks to cripple our country, our economy, our finances, and our energy, but, most importantly, the heart and soul of democracy, which is free and fair elections. Putin wants no part of free and fair elections. All of us should very much want to have a free and fair election in 2018. We are not going to have one unless we push back together and push back now.

I yield the floor.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NIGER

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, as vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I want to draw the Senate's attention to the plight of civil society leaders in Niger, where political and civil rights have been deteriorating over the last several years. This disturbing trend threatens the U.S.-Niger partnership and should concern each of us.

Mahamadou Issoufou was elected President of Niger in 2011 and, in the following years, worked cooperatively with Niger's international partners, including the United States, to make progress toward the restoration of democratic governance in that country. Our countries have partnered together on health, development, and humanitarian assistance programs, and as we all know, we have suffered tragic losses together in the fight against terrorism.

Progress toward democratic governance has been significantly eroded. Since the run up to President Issoufou's reelection in 2016, the government has increasingly persecuted opposition politicians, journalists, peaceful protesters, and civil society leaders in a manner that has undermined progress and stability in the country.

This trend has not gone unnoticed. The State Department noted in its most recent Human Rights Report that Niger's significant human rights issues include harsh and life-threatening prison and detention center conditions, detention of opposition politicians, and restrictions on freedom of assembly. In November 2017, Niger withdrew from the global Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative after being suspended for failing to meet good governance standards, including for its repression of civil society.

An example of this disturbing trend involves the arrest of several dozen civil society leaders between March and April of this year, in connection with demonstrations against the country's new finance law. Many of these individuals, like Ali Idrissa, the coordinator for the Network of Organizations for Budgetary Transparency and Analysis, are affiliated with Publish What You Pay and are advocates for transparency and accountability of Niger's revenues in order to combat corruption. That effort should be a shared goal in Niger. Peaceful public assembly and calls for accountability should not result in imprisonment.

I urge the Trump administration, other donor governments, including the EU, and the international financial institutions to hold the government of Niger accountable for respecting its citizens' right to freedom of expression and assembly and to join me in calling on President Issoufou to release the detainees and to dismiss the charges against these individuals. This is now a matter of urgency, as four civil society leaders reportedly face jail sentences at a judgment hearing on July 24.

Doing so would be a positive step by the government of Niger toward proving that it is serious about upholding the values that underscore our partnership, including to maintain its eligibility under the recently initiated Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact. That Compact is now subject to heightened scrutiny by the Appropriations Committee, which provides the funding for it.